

Washington State Has Two Occupant Protection Laws: The Seat Belt Law and The Child Restraint Law



The Seat Belt Law requires:

- **ALL** vehicle occupants to be **properly** restrained in **ALL** seating positions.
- The driver is responsible for seeing that all children under the age of 16 are properly secured.
- Passengers 16 years of age and older are responsible for themselves and may receive their own ticket if they are not properly restrained.

Buckling one seat belt around two people or placing the seat belt under the arm or behind the back is dangerous, can cause death or serious injury in a crash, and is a violation of the law.

Washington's Child Restraint Law will change on June 1, 2007 to require:

- Children under 13 years old be transported in the back seat where it is practical to do so.
- Children up to their 8th birthday, unless they are 4'9" tall (57 inches), be transported in a child restraint system. (For example a child car seat, booster seat, vest, or other restraint that is federally approved for use in the car.)
- The restraint system must be used according to the car seat **AND** vehicle manufacturer's instructions.
- Vehicles equipped with lap-only seat belts are exempt from the requirement to use a booster seat.
- Children 8-years of age or at least 4'9" who wear a seat belt **MUST** use it correctly. (NOT under the arm or behind the back.)

Since July 1, 2002 Washington State's Child Restraint Law requires:	For optimal protection, follow these recommendations from the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Department of Transportation
Child restraints to be secured in the vehicle and used according to manufacturer's instructions.	Read and follow the manufacturer's instructions and guidelines for both the child restraint and the vehicle.
Infants must ride in a rear facing car seat until they are one year of age or weigh 20 pounds (whichever comes first).	A baby needs to remain rear facing until at least one year of age and until he/she weighs at least 20 pounds. If the label on the car seat says the seat may be used rear-facing up to 30 or more pounds, this is safer than riding forward facing.
Children 1-4 years old or weighing 20-40 pounds (whichever comes first) must ride in a forward facing child safety seat with a harness.	Keep the child in a forward-facing seat with a harness as long as they fall within the height/weight recommendations for the seat. Be careful not to graduate your child to the next stage too soon.
Kids 4-6 years old or weighing 40 - 60 pounds (whichever comes first) must be in a booster seat if the vehicle is equipped with lap and shoulder belts. Vehicles equipped with lap-only seat belts are exempt from the requirement to use a booster seat.	Booster seats are recommended until the child is 8 years old and weighs 80 pounds unless the child is about 4 foot 9 inches tall. The vehicle MUST have a lap and shoulder belt to use a booster seat.
Children older than six years of age or weighing more than 60 pounds shall be restrained in either a booster seat or a properly adjusted and fastened seat belt. The law requires everyone to wear the seat belt correctly. The driver can be given a ticket if the seat belt does not properly fit the child (for example: the shoulder belt crosses the face or neck; the shoulder belt is under the arm; the shoulder belt is behind the back; or the lap belt is up on the tummy).	Try this 5-Step Test to learn when the adult seat belt properly fits your child. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Does the child sit all the way back against the vehicle seat? 2. Do the child's knees bend comfortably at the edge of the vehicle seat without slouching? 3. Does the lap belt stay on the top part of the child's thighs? 4. Is the shoulder belt centered on the chest and shoulder? 5. Can the child stay seated this way for the whole trip? If you say no to ANY of these questions, or if your child puts the shoulder part of the seat belt under their arm or behind their back, your child still needs a booster seat.
When the vehicle has an active front air bag, the child should ride in the back seat whenever it is practical to do so.	Children less than 13 years of age are safer in the back seat regardless of an air bag.